

## **The Summertime Blues** by [lavenderfieldscemetery](#)

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**Summary:** When Eddie finds his home life so unbearable that he runs away, he doesn't realise the terrible danger being on the streets can mean... Both for him, and the other children of Derry.

## 1. Chapter 1

### 1

Mrs Reichs had never been quite pleased with the seating arrangement of 6/L. If she had her own way, she would have preferred it boy, girl, boy, girl. Unfortunately, there were rather insolent and mischievous members of the class; Henry Bowers, Patrick Hockstetter, Richie Tozier and Reginald 'Belch' Huggins to name just a few. These boys were not to be trusted, and Mrs Reichs found herself re-seating them far, far away from the girls within the second week of September!

A boy by the name of Patrick Hockstetter was particularly capricious. In fact, Mrs Reichs had considered calling his parents on many occasions to allow him for a psychiatric evaluation. An apathetic student, and a deviant, Patrick has been moved to many different places, and seemingly none of them have been to his benefit, or to anybody else's. In alphabetical order, Patrick had been placed right next to Belch Huggins. At first, Reichs thought this arrangement would turn out rather spectacular; however on the fourth day, Huggins had gone to her at lunch complaining of being harassed by the boy. When asked what had happened, Reginald had turned red in the face and refused to talk about it.

Seating arrangement number 2 had almost been a success – if only it weren't for Henry Bowers being such a violent boy. As Henry was two years older than Patrick (he'd been held back a few years because of his lack of interest in school), Mrs Reichs had been wary of seating Patrick next to him. Henry and Patrick had seemed to get along just fine, and Reichs was pleased with the combination. Henry had allowed Patrick to help him with his work, and she had seen an improvement in Henry's rather lack-luster grades. However, just a few days later, Mrs Reichs had caught Henry holding Patrick in a headlock. She wasn't quite sure what had happened to get the two into a fight, but she guessed it had something to do with 'inappropriate touching'.

The following day, Mrs Reichs had situated Patrick next to a girl. Her name was Veronica Grogan, and she was shy, quiet and a rather

intelligent pupil. As Patrick was also shy, the 6th grade teacher had desperately paired the two together for many science assignments and school trips.

There had been a small scream, interrupting Reichs from her Geography lesson. Anxiously scanning the classroom for the source of the scream, she didn't need to be psychic to know it had come from the second row where Patrick was next to Veronica Grogan.

'Don't ever pull my hair again, you creep!' Grogan had squealed, clasping her long brunette braid in her shaking hands. The poor girl looked furiously close to tears, and Mrs Reichs felt a kind of distant sympathy for her. Instead of comforting her, she felt oddly angry, not quite at Patrick (he had a slippery strange way of attracting Mrs Reichs's empathy) but at Veronica for distracting her class.

'Miss Grogan, please stop being such a silly girl and wait outside the room. I don't have time for your behaviour!'

Veronica had never been told off before. Her parents had spoilt her rotten and wouldn't dare ever shout at their precious darling. She hadn't ever been yelled at in school either, being so quiet and well-behaved. Storming out the class room, attracting all of 6/L's attention, Veronica slammed the door behind her, causing the glass window to rattle vulnerably in its frame.

Mrs Reichs sighed and continued her Geography lecture on China. Giving Hockstetter a stern, almost confused glance, Reichs simply chose to ignore his benign grin in return. *Well, his parents will certainly be getting a call home! I've just about had enough of him!*

Greta Bowie, one of Veronica's friends, had shot Patrick a look that could have killed. Turning to her friend, she whispered something malicious into her ear, causing the girl to giggle behind her hand in a geisha-like manner. Eddie Corcoran, hissed in Patrick's direction, 'You're dead, Hockstetter.'

Instead of being terrified, Patrick simply threw back his blond head and cackled wildly.

Break time arrived at last and Eddie found Patrick sat alone on a bench just outside the school hall. *Good.*

Tracking down Patrick had been easy; the boy always sat alone, withdrawn and macabre in his own little world. A small tin pencil case was clenched in Patrick's clammy, pallid hands. Eddie knew what was in there all right. Goodness, *everyone* knew what was in *there*!

Eddie could remember one day back in December where Patrick had come to him, smiling dizzily, carrying that same pencil case. Placing the pencil case onto Eddie's desk, he had slowly opened the lid and shown the horrified boy its grisly contents; chopped up flies were piled up inside the lower compartment, squashed up against the roof and reeking of death.

Shaking his head of the memory, Eddie placed a hand against Patrick's cheek, causing him to break from his daze.

'Hockstetter,' Eddie began, smiling calmly. Patrick could sense danger in his voice, 'Hasn't anybody taught you to behave yourself in front of a lady?'

Patrick Hockstetter smirked in his typical porky-vacant manner. As he said nothing in return, Eddie wrongly mistook his silence as shyness. Fury overtook him. Maybe it was natural impulse, maybe it was his step-father's influence. 50/50. Grabbing Patrick's collar and leaning in closer, he hissed, 'Don't ever touch her, got it?'

Smiling benevolently and nodding, Patrick looked as if he wanted to get away. Eddie wouldn't allow any such thing and pushed Patrick away so that he smashed his head against the back of the wooden bench. As Patrick continued nodding and smiling, Eddie gave up on him and turned to leave.

'It's only because you have a crush on her...' Patrick whispered huskily to Eddie's retreating back, 'She's not even pretty anyway.'

Eddie whipped around, his dark, dopey eyes dancing with anger, 'So what? Tell anyone and I'll make you wish you were dead, Patrick.' However, much to Patrick's amusement, there was a dull flush on

Eddie's face.

Disgruntled, Eddie stalked off to find Henry and his pals. Patrick simply remained on the bench, swinging his legs cheerfully.

## 2. Chapter 2

'Thank God it's Friday, huh?' Eddie heard Victor Criss guffaw to his two best friends, 'Almost summer too! Can't wait to fuck up the Losers then.' He had grinned, flashing his oddly crooked teeth much to Eddie's disgust. Nobody would be surprised if Victor came into school with a brace; most of the time Vic attempts to hide his teeth by not smiling so much, however quite a few people have commented in the past. All those said people really regretted their snide comments. Especially that Richie Tozier!

Henry and Belch had both agreed, chortling and making plans for the holidays. Turning his back on Henry and his gang, (feeling kind of left out of their plans) Eddie cleared his throat. Clenching and unclenching his tense hands, he let out a deep sigh. Apprehension churned inside his stomach full of butterflies – he was going to ask Veronica Grogan out this Saturday – God help him.

His heart hammered as he caught sight of Veronica at her locker. She had her back to him, showing off all her long brunette hair that cascaded to her narrow waist. Veronica was pretty. Hell, she was gorgeous! *Fuck Patrick, he doesn't know anything about girls!*

Just as Veronica was about to slam her locker and skip off to home room, Eddie brushed past her shoulder lightly. Flinching, Veronica glared coldly up at him.

'I'm sick of all these stupid boys that think they can touch me! I wish daddy could send me to an all-girls academy, far away from this dump!' Her face pinched in anger, yet Eddie still thought she looked rather beautiful.

'L-look I'm sorry for disturbing you, but I'd like to know if you're... doing anything this weekend?' Eddie breathed, his face aghast with nerves and his usually tanned skin turned a fair white.

Veronica remained grimly silent – perhaps worried that he would attempt to kiss her or something, in front of all her friends. They had reputation, you see...

Eddie could sense his peer wasn't keen to talk, so anxiously raked a hand through his dark hair and tried again: 'Umm, so what do you say? We could catch a movie at the Aladdin. If you wanted to, that is.'

'No,' Veronica said firmly, head held high, 'No thank you.' She had noticed Greta Bowie on her left, glaring ferociously and mouthing 'say no!' and that awful Bowers boy to her right, snickering behind his hand. The peer pressure was great, and she had to admit, Eddie was a good looking boy – however her father was taking her for a road trip down to the beach that weekend, so unfortunately she had to decline.

Eddie had never felt so disappointed in his 12 short years of life. He briefly wondered if it were something to do with his eyes; everybody said they looked a bit girly. Shrugging his shoulders in a 'suit yourself' gesture, he swung his backpack over his shoulders and left the girl to get back to her own business.

'The only man you can trust is your daddy.' Greta Bowie whispered softly, leaning her cheek against her friend's in a failed attempt of comfort.

'Hmmpf, I guess you're right, Greta.' Veronica smiled a sweet, sunny smile and linked her arm through Greta's. 'That Corcoran is from the poor side of Derry, anyway. What would mommy think if I were to go on a date with him!'

'Heehee~ She'd probably think you'd gone completely mad!' Greta beamed, 'You deserve so much better, Ronnie.'

## 2

Eddie had given his spare ticket to Henry Bowers instead. He figured the older boy needed a bit of fun in his life, something besides tormenting others that is. There had been a lot of teasing – although that had been more than expected – although Eddie couldn't ever recall seeing Henry on a date with a girl. Although this one time he thought he caught him ogling that stupid Hockstetter kid.

Henry and Eddie had ended up seeing The Blob together, and

throughout the film they were bitching about Patrick Hockstetter, and school, and girls and Mrs Reichs and her strict methods of teaching. After the movie had finished, Eddie felt just a little better about being turned down by Veronica Grogan; although he had to admit, Bowers sure did act funny about Patrick! Whenever he wanted to bring up the topic of Hockstetter, Henry had abruptly changed the conversation back to Grogan, a nervous grin plastered across his face.

He didn't seem to like talking about Patrick all that much. *Too bad.*

### 3

It was late when Eddie got home that Saturday night. He was honestly terrified that his mom and step-father would be angry with him for getting back at 9pm. Watching Henry swagger back down his road had been inspiring. Many people looked up to Henry despite him being so cruel. He was... bold, and fearless, with an air of authority. Nobody knew that Henry was absolutely petrified of the dark. The way he was bopping down the street, not one person would have thought differently.

'Sorry I'm late, mam,' Eddie called, closing the door behind him. Night air leaked in through the porch. 'I was out with a friend, Henry, if you know who he is.'

His mother was sewing something pretty at her craft table. It was lacy and pink by the looks of it. *Probably a brassiere*, Eddie thought, resisting the urge to giggle childishly. At a closer glance, Eddie could see his mother was obviously in a bad state of mind. Tear tracks ran down her gentle face, and her eyelashes were wet with mascara smudged across her cheeks.

'W-what's the matter, mommy?'

'It's just... Oh, check the newspaper, Edd!' She sniffled, rubbing at her panda-eyes miserably.

Eddie tentatively picked up the local newspaper and scanned the headlines with disregard; almost expecting to see an article on his family in there. After all, it was so darn obvious that his step-father had murdered his baby brother! Unexpectedly, his body froze, cold



all over. Shocked tears splurged down his frigid face, devoid of any emotion.

'Oh, Eddie. I know it hurts. I don't know what I'd ever do if I lost you! This girl... Veronica. Did you know her?'

Eddie wasn't sure he wanted to have this conversation. Grievously shaking his head no, tears flew from his eyes, collecting on his lashes. He let out a hiccup-y gasp and attempted to escape to his bedroom. His mother grasped his hand and pulled him closer, lulling him to stop his sobbing. Under normal circumstances Eddie would be embarrassed to be held by his mom. Today was different. Veronica was dead and there was no going back now.

*Dead.* It sounded odd and foreign in Eddie's mind. Once before he had been faced by death; his own baby brother's in all honesty. It was unnatural. Disturbing. Terrible that a kid of just 12 years old could die. Terrible that a kid of just 2 years old could die. Terrible that any kid could die at such a tender age. Eddie would give anything to die an old man, warm and safe in his own bed, surrounded by loved ones and with a dog at the foot of his bed. Instead, kids in Derry were dropping dead like flies. Every now and again a new report was aired on the TV, or an article printed in a newspaper of yet another kid being ripped open and mutilated on the streets of Derry. Funny how that happens, huh? Why kids? Why not elderly folk, or hookers, or beggars? Those children had died, their faces frozen with a ghastly expression. On a street corner, or maybe a sewer some place, blood would be spilled almost certainly every day.

### 3. Chapter 3

*Saturday 3rd May, 1958*

*Dear diary,*

*Today must have been one of the worst days of my life, including the day my baby brother passed on. Sincerely. Now Veronica is dead, I feel so awful. I found out the news last night from my mother. It was even in the fucking headlines! How could somebody do something so terrible to such a cute girl? She was only twelve for Christ's sake! I don't think I'll ever be able to forget this day... I just wish the ground would swallow me up.*

*Monday 5th May, 1958*

*Dear diary,*

*The class feels so empty without Veronica. I caught Greta Bowie crying this morning. What a sight! I've never seen a Bowie cry before. She thinks she's all tough, but everyone was crying. Well, apart from Henry Bowers and Patrick Hockstetter. Why are they so emotionless? It's really odd. I think they're crazy. Wouldn't be surprised at all if the guidance councillor were to take them away for an inspection...*

*I don't want to admit this to anybody (although Victor Criss did hand me a handkerchief behind his friends' backs), but I cried for hours. My eyes still sting now. Okay, I admit it; I had a thing for Veronica Grogan. She was beautiful with long brown hair and blue eyes. Veronica was quiet, but a very clever girl. I could tell.*

*It's hard to believe she's gone.*

*In the morning the school held a little assembly in her memory. At the end of it the headmistress was preaching at us about 'stranger danger' and how to protect yourself from 'strange adults'. A load of rubbish if you ask me – Veronica wasn't some dumb whore.*

*Tuesday 6th May, 1958*

*Dear diary,*

*Why did my mom remarry such a fucking horrible man? He's fucking crazy! Ask anybody!*

*Today he has burnt his cigarette butt into my arm. It hurts so badly. Mom had just ignored me when I'd gone to her crying. What a bitch! I can't trust anybody anymore. No one cares about me.*

*I wish I could live with my real dad. He's in Boston though... I miss him so much.*

*My step dad's constantly yelling at me, making me do all the chores (I'm not fucking Cinderella!), hurting me when I disobey or do something wrong, even accidentally. I hate him. One of these days I'm gonna end up killing him. Sincerely.*

*Friday 9th May, 1958*

*Dear Diary,*

*My life really isn't looking up at the moment, huh? School was terrible, although that's nothing new.... Mrs Reichs gave me a detention for slapping Hockstetter. He deserved it though! Really he fucking did! That asshole was winding me up about Veronica, teasing me about being turned down by her. Patrick really should watch his mouth. If he doesn't want to lose all his perfect teeth that is.*

*He's such a baby fag! I guess he was just jealous that I get to be around Henry more than him. I don't even understand why Henry would let him hang around anyway. He so... girly and weak. He's harmless. Patrick couldn't even beat up that pansy Eddie Kaspbrak! Wow that's something I'd like to see!*

*Anyway, detention was the worst. All the usual guys were there; Henry, Reg Belch, Trashmouth and even Victor this time. It was like being trapped with a bunch of wild animals. Seriously. I don't want to talk about it... I've never had a detention before – mom was so mad with me! I'm really scared for when my step-dad comes home and finds out. I think I should disappear to downtown for a while and lay low.*

*Saturday 10th May, 1958*

*Dear Diary,*

*Hey, something really good happened today! It's so amazing! My dad, my REAL dad sent me a letter in the mail asking if I'd like to go on holiday with him! TO FLORIDA! I've never been on holiday before. Well, out of Maine I mean. I'm so excited. We'll be leaving at the end of this month when daddy has finished his work out in Boston.*

*Apparently in Florida it's always hot and sunny – I really need that. Here in Derry for the past few days it just won't stop raining! I'm so sick of it.*

*Sunday 11th May, 1958*

*Dear Diary,*

*Tom's hurt me again. I can't move my elbow without it being very, very painful. I totally think it's broken. I can hear and feel the bones grinding against each other. Bruises are forming there too! Why can't mom take me to the hospital? She's telling me I'm being a stupid baby. I'm telling her she's a stupid cow. Now I've been sent to my room.*

*I can't stand it anymore. I'm thinking of leaving home. My real dad's the only person who loves me, and I hate this shitty small town. Everything about it just stinks. Everything and everyone. I want out.*

*Monday 12th May, 1958*

*Dear Diary,*

*This is it. I've been tempted for a while now. I'm running away. If anyone even tries to stop me I'll get out my step-dad's .30-.30 and blow their brains out. I can't take it anymore; everything is just so fucking awful.*

*Screw mom. She doesn't even care for me. Not after baby Dorsey died.*

*Fuck dad. He cancelled on me. Apparently he's busy at work. I thought he loved me.*

*I've been planning this a while now. If it wasn't for my education, I would have done it already.*

*I'm going to pack one change of clothes, most of my step-dad's cash that he'd kept in his underwear drawer (he doesn't deserve it) and some tootsie rolls for on the way.*

*Well, I guess this is the end of my journal. I have to admit I'll miss writing in it every now and again, but maybe when I've made a better life for myself, I'll buy a new one and record my thoughts then.*

## 4. Chapter 4

Eddie's heart flipped as he lay sprawled on the ground. He wasn't quite sure if he was feeling particularly happy, sad, or anxious - but somehow he felt although something heavy were sat on his chest, suffocating him slowly. His eyes were glued together with something coppery and sticky, and his limbs felt like they were on an entirely different planet altogether. Giving small, shaky gasps as if he were a woman in labour, or perhaps having an asthma attack, he whimpered as he found he couldn't open his eyes to see where he was. *This hadn't been part of the plan! Why was I stupid as to run away? I should have known it would've failed! God, now my step-dad's probably killed me and this is Hell - where I belong for thinking such evil thoughts about him. Mom always told me I'd go to Hell for thinking bad thoughts. Well, I guess I'll meet my step-dad when he eventually dies.*

As Eddie couldn't see his surroundings, he allowed himself to find his way around by his other senses. The scent of stale cotton candy washed over him, and it was then he realised how hungry he was. Stomach growling, Eddie attempted to sit up from his broken-doll position. No such luck. Eddie's fingers gave little twitches as his frayed nerves and broken bones screamed with agony; resisting screams that would alert his presence, he clamped a clammy, shattered hand against his slack jaw, fractured bones grinding. He felt broken all over as though he'd taken a stumble down one hundred flights of steps. *God, he's really fucked me up this time. But where am I?*

His brown eyes flew open in the darkness, brimming with tears and sparkling with a new found insanity. All of a sudden he found himself choking back a manic laugh as the blood - his blood - ran down his face. His severely deformed arm found it's own way to his backpack and rested itself against his step-father's -30-30. At that moment Eddie vowed to himself that he'd shoot his step-father on first sight. *Surely he'd come back to finish his job killing me, just like he did with my baby brother?*

Tuning in even more carefully to his surroundings, Eddie could hear a steady dripping, dropping sound. The liquid landed on something metallic with a small 'ploosh!' every two seconds or so. He guessed his

surroundings as either his step-father's garage, or some small outdoor nook and cranny out in the pine forests. *That would make sense for the pitch-blackness if it were night time, but why on earth can I smell cotton candy? I really wish I could see right now- I'm cold and scared. My body really hurts. This must be what Dorsey felt like when step-father killed him. Now I'm going to die the same way... I'll die of blood-loss. From being beaten to death with step-father's hammer. Why did I deserve this? Mom was so stupid to marry this man. Didn't she know he was mad?*

Again, his stomach growled miserably with the thought of cotton candy. How long had it been since he last ate? The last time Eddie could remember eating was when he was packing a bag to run away with - he had stuffed two Tootsie Rolls, three sets of candy buttons and five red vines into the folds of his spare clothes - and had eaten them all at once upon entering the Memorial Park gates. Lamenting himself inwardly, Eddie attempted to crawl onto his belly and scrabble in the darkness for his backpack. If it weren't for the agony crawling up and down his limbs, Eddie thought he could've found his pack a hundred times easier. Eventually his left calf skimmed the scratchy polyester of his backpack strap. Giving blind fumbles in the dark, Eddie attacked the zipper and groped his way inside for something to help him see.

He hissed curse words under his shaking, close to tears voice as the match he was attempting to light got blown out by a sudden draft. In surprise, he dropped his burnt-out match stick and let out a small sob. His own voice echoed all around him, bouncing off the walls of the cave and repeating and over and over. Somewhere in the dark, Eddie was sure he could hear murmured taunts of other children - laughing at him for being so childish. Mingled fear of both the dark and his step-father caught up to him and he drew his knees back up to his chest. In his foetal position, Eddie felt just a little better. Well, his agonised stomach did anyway. The rest of his body was currently giving him silent screams of protest.

Tears collected in his eyes and rolled backwards down to the hard ground, collecting on his ears and lashes. The cold salt water made his scratched-up face sting with faint pain. Eddie scrunched up his face in effort not to sob loudly like a little baby - Henry would make fun of him otherwise. *Why am I worrying about what Henry would*

*think?! He's not even here, but God, I wish he was! He'd know how to get out of this situation. He was so brave...*

Turning over on his left slightly in aid of a more comfortable position, Eddie's hand fell into something icy cold and with that water came a terrible smell. It was an awful stench that smelt somewhat like a blocked storm drain. Images of bloated corpses and the Creature From The Black Lagoon danced inside Eddie's mind, driving his knees even closer to his face. Right now, he really wished he could be at home watching TV with his mom, instead of half-dead and trapped in a stinky little tunnel where his step-dad would find him and murder him. Suddenly, he had an idea; *to follow the stream of water would perhaps lead to the outside world? If I can crawl along the same direction as the stream then maybe I'll end up somewhere outside the Barrens? Then, I can run to the cops and say my step-father's tried to murder me and bury me alive inside the sewers... As if anybody would believe that!* Spitting disgustedly to the floor and adjusting to his hands and knees, Eddie let out a wince as his legs almost gave way. Trailing miserably along the floor although he were only a toddler, he spent what felt like a decade attempting to navigate the horrific underground world of the sewers. As he saw some kind of light in the oh-so far away distance, circus music began to ring teasingly in his ears. Surely he must be imagining things? What kind of sewer plays circus music? What kind of sewer sells cotton candy?!

Eddie stopped in his tracks. His eyes froze with a pure white-hot terror. A whimper escalated in his throat but he found himself too stricken with terror to even voice it. There in the dim light of the sewer's tunnel was a clown grinning from ear to ear. Clutched in his claw-like gloved hands were a cluster of balloons not unlike those you'd see in a circus. Eddie found himself horribly defenceless, broken and on his hands and knees whereas the clown-man just stood there swaying, it's jagged and crooked teeth bared in a sick, bloodied smile.

'Hey there, bucko!' the clown screeched, yellow eyes glinting like a cat's in the dark. 'Like it down here? We float down here... We ALL float! And now you're here - you'll float too!'

Eddie's eyes bulged.



'We all float!' the clown repeated, eyes ablaze and wild with fury.

A scream rose in Eddie's throat, but he felt too drained and almost fatigued with wasn't quite sure if he were going mad, or if he were in Hell... or even if this clown was his step-father in some terrible nightmare.

The clown continued, his voice now echoing powerfully all around, 'If it's not to your liking, Eddie Corcoran, it could always change.'

'Hunh?' Eddie slurred, his jaw slack with numb terror. Beads of sweat were now standing out on his paled forehead, many of them falling down into the stream of excrement in his effort to save himself from collapsing.

As if the clown had never even been there - only a mirage - Eddie found himself gazing glassily at the darkened concrete wall of the sewer pipe, hands still trailing in the filthy water. Steadily, he blinked. *No, no, I'm just being stupid, Ed. There was no clown here! What the fuck would a clown be doing in the sewers?! You're just hallucinating from lack of food... Or... or driving yourself mad with worry about the step-father. There's no such thing as monsters!*

Eddie's stomach gave another growl in the dark. Sighing, forgetting about the clown, and maybe feeling a little faint, Eddie unzipped his pack again. He desperately hoped he hadn't eaten *all* his candy on the way. Although, he had to admit he had a bit of a sweet-tooth. Unfortunately Eddie's backpack was empty except for some stupid, old pairs of underpants! Letting out an angry groan of despair, Eddie clutched at his hair and threw his backpack across the space of the tunnel. Somewhere nearby it landed with a rather loud splash.

As if to taunt the boy, the smell of candy floss became overpowering. Everywhere Eddie could smell the candy; soft on his skin, in the filthy water, tangled in his hair, being carried in the air... He felt he would go mad if he stayed there any longer. Yet he was lost. Attempting a weak spin on his knees, Eddie was humiliated to find himself salivating at the thought of the cotton candy; his stomach cramped up and his head span at the very thought of leaving it alone. *How long can I survive under here? Better question yet, exactly how long have I already been here?*

The darkness rippled in his eyes, and Eddie slumped to the ground, his face half-submerged under the water's filth.

## 2

With a blink, Eddie's eyes came back into focus. Somewhat, he wished they hadn't. He was still stuck in these nightmarish sewers! Mixed scents filled his nostrils and churned his stomach. Thankfully he wasn't hungry anymore - the smell of the raw sewage had fixed that.

*God I want to go home...*

## 3

'Mom! Mom!' Eddie flinched from his nightmare, eyes rimmed with fat tears and half his face still coated with dried blood. He slapped a dazed hand to his cheek and realised with a bitterness that he was still underneath Derry. In his dream, Eddie was back home with his mother and stepfather. It was so awful that Eddie felt himself ashamedly breakdown and cry. His stepfather had been beating on his mom, and he could do nothing to stop him. Zilch. Nada. He was dead. How could a dead boy stop his father from beating on his mother? It was too late. Eddie was already gone and forgotten. Of course they'd made and raised other kids - and who could blame them? *I was a terrible son. But none of them could stop Zack either... Truth be told I don't even think they cared like I do. ...Did.*

*I hope they're happy now I'm dead. I hope they're happy stepfather killed me. I deserved it. Really, truly I did. I couldn't stick up for mom. Fuck - I couldn't even stick up for myself - Zack was just too strong... But, I wonder if mom's looking for me? She didn't look for baby Dorsey. The cops found him out in our back yard. Shows how much she cares, huh? Wait... What am I talking about? I'm not really dead! Eddie, you're just being silly and overly sensitive! Show some common sense.*

'Well,' Eddie announced loudly to the empty sewers, 'I don't care if she cares. She's nothing to me anymore.'

Somewhere along the pipes Eddie could hear laughing. He decided he was going mad.

'Mommy, if you're there - I'm having the best sleep I've ever had! Six feet underground!'

More laughing... *God, what are these sewers? It's more of a circus or a mental asylum than an underground system!*

'Hey, Zack. Come and get me! I'm waiting for you to finish me off, you pussy!'

Footsteps splashed out of Eddie's line of vision. His heart began to palpitate, worrying it actually *was* his stepfather coming to kill him. 'Daddy? A-are you there?'

As sudden as a gunshot, and probably as loud as one, came a laugh. It was a child's laugh - gleeful and innocent, reminding Eddie of hot summer afternoons, ice cream sundaes and making mud pies at kindergarten. He shot up from his broken position, eyes darting in alarm from left to right, up and down. *Who else could be lost in these sewers? Doesn't sound like anybody I know.*

'Hello. Who is that?' Eddie called, disgusted at how weedy and girly his voice had just sounded.

The laughing stopped. A little too quickly in Eddie's opinion. It was almost eerie, the sudden silence. With a sudden draught, Eddie's heart skipped a beat and he almost laughed with relief when he saw who had laughed. Still, it didn't make the situation any less weird.

Two boys (Eddie guessed their ages at either five or six and two or three) were stood side by side, hands clasped and grinning although it were Christmas. One wore a shiny yellow raincoat, and looking closer, it seemed he only had one arm, and that was the one the other boy was holding. Eddie shuddered. He had ruddy, healthy-looking cheeks dusted with light freckles and Brunette hair hidden beneath a matching yellow rain hat. His friend, it seemed, reminded Eddie of somebody a lot, but he couldn't quite put his finger on who it was. He was a few years younger than the one-armed boy and beamed up at him although he were his older brother. Their small hands knotted together reminded Eddie of his younger sibling, Dorsey, and he felt himself swallow harshly. Now was no time to be blubbering!

'Umm uh,' began Eddie, suddenly lost for words. *What do you say to somebody in this situation?!* 'Are you boys lost?' The two boys glanced at each other cheekily and the youngest one with two arms snickered, pasting his spare hand across his mouth. 'Boy, I sure am!' Eddie added, wanting to seem more informal and approachable to the children. They might be scared, Eddie figured.

Instead of saying anything, the eldest gave a shy, almost mysterious smile. To Eddie, the smile clearly said 'Not telling. You have to guess! Play our game, Eddie! Play our guessing game, it's fun!'

Annoyed, ravenous and in a lot of pain, Eddie felt all these things add up and force him to explode; 'Look, kid. Just tell me where the fucking exit is to this looney bin. I'll give you a dollar.'

The youngest tittered, and Eddie finally realised exactly who the boy reminded him of. Patrick Hockstetter. *A bit stupid really, Patrick didn't have a brother as far as I know.*

Still, they ignored him in a sly silence. Both were smiling coyly although they knew something Eddie didn't, and Eddie was just too stupid a big kid to know it. Tears sprung to Eddie's eyes as he considered begging. He opened his mouth to bark an order - after all, when you were that age, being the eldest gave you a certain kind of authority - and all that would come out was a mousy squeak and howls of sadness. Both boys smiles widened. The one-armed boy looked although he wanted to burst out laughing, and very nearly did if it weren't for the youngest boy speaking; 'We don't tell cry babies,' he taunted, wagging his finger in jest.

'Hehehe!' the eldest giggled, again reminding Eddie of Dorsey, 'Yeah~ Act like your age, Eddie!'

Eddie was surprised that the boy knew his name. So surprised that he stopped weeping. He couldn't ever recall seeing this boy before, yet, like the other, he seemed just so familiar! *Maybe I know his older sibling or something?*

The pair turned to leave - 'Wait!' Eddie hollered, his voice echoing all around, 'Stay with me please!' His dark, wet eyes widened in the dark as the two boys turned to him. He saw something, that in all honesty,

he really did not want to see. Ever.

Those boys were as dead as he was.

#### 4

A kind of smile formed on Eddie's face. It was murky, yet all so clear. So muddled, yet almost logical in Eddie's deeply confused mindset. The sewers was a circus. Not the kind where you'd sit down in some grand tent where the ringmaster would introduce daring, death-defying tightrope walkers and fearless animal tamers - no - not that kind of circus. This was just pure craziness. The kind of circus where every act was staged for disaster and all sideshows ended in certain death. In a way, Eddie supposed he knew it already. Derry was a dangerous, dark, poisoned little town filled with shitty people who were filled with shitty hate about shitty things.

Could these dead boys truly exist? Who knew? Eddie knew, and the answer was almost certainly yes. Anything could happen in Derry. He'd seen it all before in one of those double creature features he'd seen with Henry Bowers. The zombies had taken over and only wanted one thing - brains.

But that was crazy... Eddie decided he was getting too paranoid again and simply decided to ignore the boys - they were just stupid little kids, and perhaps it was the constant darkness that had led to fearing these kids.

'We're not going to eat you,' Came a sweet voice from somewhere in the sewers. Choking, Eddie thought it sounded something like Veronica Grogan used to. But that would be absurd.

A girl stepped out from behind the two boys, long hair swinging with exaggerated movement, arms crossed behind her back.

'Oh my-'

'Hi, Eddie,' simpered Veronica shyly, 'It's been a while since I last saw you.'

Forgetting about the two 'un-dead' boys, forgetting that he was lost in the pitch black, smelly underground system of Derry, forgetting that

Veronica's mauled, dead body had been found just a few weeks earlier, forgetting that said body disappeared soon after the crime, nowhere to be seen but with a puddle of blood left behind - Eddie could only think how lucky he was to see her again. 'Ronnie!' He cried, almost going to hug the girl.

'No, don't hug me. Don't call me 'Ronnie'. It's 'Veronica' to you.' Veronica snapped, suddenly irritated about how forward her classmate was being right now. 'I don't want to be touched by somebody like you.'

Eddie's eyes narrowed. Why was Veronica being such a bitch all of a sudden? Didn't she know that he had almost died and could use all the kindness he could get? She never used to be so snappy, and that was one of the many reasons Eddie had felt himself falling for her. Now he could see her in a better light, he saw that her yellow and white gingham dress was torn and muddied with something a deep dark brown. *That's probably why*, he thought. *Nothing annoys Veronica more than having her clothes ruined. She was prissy like that.*

'Well, umm, okay. Sorry,' Eddie found himself apologising, feeling dumb in front of his crush, 'Well, um, do you perhaps know where we are, Veronica? I've been lost for a while now and these stupid kids won't tell me the way out.'

Veronica smiled. *Oh god, not her too.*

'How cute!' Veronica taunted, twirling a strand of hair around her forefinger, 'Tell me, Eddie. Don't you think if I knew the way out, I'd still be in this horrible place?'

Eddie said nothing. He felt too stupid. A minute passed, then finally he said something just to break the giddy silence creeping between the four, 'Well, how long have you been here then?'

'Weeks. I just can't escape. It's useless.' Veronica sighed, tossing a sheet of brunette hair over her shoulder. 'I want to leave. I want my daddy. But, I've been wondering round for days on end, and I just can't find the exit. It's a labyrinth in here.'

Eddie felt butterflies in his stomach. 'I could help you... If you want,

that is.'

Veronica blinked, unsure whether to trust the boy or not 'Fine,' She mumbled, 'Just don't be mean to the kids.'

In all honesty, Veronica knew exactly what had happened to end her up in the sewers - she just wanted to keep the game going was all. Hey, if she didn't have Greta Bowie to mess around with, who else would she have to wind up? If she were to be completely honest, Veronica would admit she quite likes to see Eddie all anxious over her. She knew he had a crush on her; she knew he would do anything to please her and get in her good books, but what she didn't know was that Eddie himself was in a particularly foul mood at this moment in time. He was on the brink of a breakdown, and not even himself knew that.

A few hours passed of useless fumbling around in the dark, muffled swearing and snarky comments. If Eddie was tired before, now he was positively dead on his feet.

'If you don't mind me asking, exactly why did you runaway, Veronica?'

'Runaway?' Veronica laughed a chime-like laugh, 'Why would I run away, Eddie? I loved my life above the sewers.'

'So... You *didn't* run away then?' Eddie whispered, confused, 'Then what happened?'

Veronica grinned, her eyes glinting mischievously in the dark. They were a baby blue, and Eddie thought they looked both intelligent and calculating, although she was keeping something from him just to be malicious. Despite the beautiful colour, Veronica's eyes were also frosty and harsh. She shook her head grimly.

'God!' Eddie exclaimed, just about stopping himself from stomping his foot in irritation, 'Why won't any of you guys tell me anything?! I'm so confused!'

Veronica kept her eyes trained on the dirty porcelain tunnel floor as she followed the path. Just then, Eddie thought he saw something a

little more tender in her face. Was it sadness? Possibly.

'I'm sorry, Eddie.' She deadpanned, 'It's just... Pennywise. We aren't supposed to tell you just yet.' The two boys (which Eddie had forgotten about in his haste to greet Veronica) nodded their heads in agreement, each keeping close to Veronica's side.

*What's Pennywise? Is she fucking mad?*

'I see. Okay then...' Eddie murmured, feeling rather put-out, 'I won't press for details then.'

'Thank you,' Veronica said with a tight-lipped smile. 'Y'know, I actually think you can be a gentleman sometimes, but don't get too carried away with yourself.' Eddie laughed - he wasn't quite sure if that was a compliment or not. Perhaps it was a backhanded compliment?

Eddie felt so overjoyed with Veronica's comment that he hadn't noticed she had stopped directly in front of him. He stumbled into her, almost knocking her flying. She gave him a quick quizzical glare, then paused, hands on hips. Her brown hair was illuminated warmly in the sudden evening sun, casting four long shadows across the barren floor, painting the sky with shades of fiery red and filling Eddie with an amazing recovery of zest - finally, they were above ground. And God, Eddie was happy. He had never been so afraid of such a silly thing as the dark, even as a young child! But how long had he been there? He must have been out cold for some while before. Bit by bit, Eddie realised how selfish he'd been - *Veronica must have been down there longer... She must have been so cold and lonely for weeks on end. How did she keep from going crazy? No wonder she was so short with me earlier. God, I'm such a jerk! I could've at least offered her my jacket!*

Nobody said anything. Both pre-teens just took in the scenery, feeling relaxed and calm for the first time in some while. There was no noise, and nobody spoke. Only the sound of the stream trickling around their legs and the seabirds crying in the distance could be heard. The smell of the pines was fresh and welcome to Eddie. On any other day, he wouldn't have enjoyed the scent, but after spending some age trapped in a tunnel smelling of sewage water, it was better than anything he'd ever smelt before. Eddie closed his eyes. Just to



Veronica's left, there was a flash of pale toffee brown - Veronica blinked - it was a doe! Never before had she seen something so beautiful. Giving Eddie a small nudge with her elbow, she pointed him in it's direction with an eager smile. The doe crept past them timidly, then stopped frozen in their path, bright, dewy eyes wide with fear of the human race. It seemed to tremble like a leaf caught in wind, then her eyes connected with the children. There was a crack somewhere nearby and she was gone as fleetingly as she'd arrived.

'This must be a good luck charm,' Veronica whispered, beaming genuinely, 'I think we're going to be so lucky right now.'

Eddie turned to her, sharing her excitement. 'She was beautiful,' he agreed. For a moment he paused. His lower lip trembled, and then; 'I'm so glad you're not dead, Veronica.'

'Excuse me?'

'I-I said, 'I'm so glad you're not dead, Veronica.' Eddie grimaced, suddenly feeling uneasy. *Am I going mad, or does something seem not quite right?*

*Again, what was with that secretive smile?*

'Come again?'

'You heard me,' Eddie shot back defensively, 'And I'm not saying it again. It's embarrassing.'

Veronica's simper didn't waver once, 'Oh, well that's very sweet of you. But...' suddenly she burst out in a fit of the giggles. Eddie's heart started sinking and he broke out in a cold sweat. *God, she really has gone crazy...*

'But,' she repeated, louder this time, 'Eddie!' she cried, eyes wide, 'I am dead!'

*Oh God! I'm stuck here with a mad woman! She's gone fucking mental!*

'Veronica,' Eddie said in his best psychiatrist voice. His tone was calming and clearly stated, *"speak to me. You can tell me anything, you*

*know.*" 'As far as I can see, you're pretty much alive and kicking. I *really* don't think you're dead.' He added a charming giggle for good measure.

Veronica's face fell. Eddie couldn't help but feel bad for the girl - she'd obviously been lost down there in the dark for weeks and had gone insane.

'Do you think I'm really stupid?' Veronica hissed, face scrunching up in annoyance.

'W-well, you're not stupid,' Eddie said, playing his words carefully, 'I think you're confused. And I can understand th-'

'You're wrong!' the girl snarled, stomping her 4-cm high-heeled shoe, 'I really am dead, and you're just ignorant!'

With that, Eddie really had no idea what to say, what to do. Briefly he wondered how Mrs Reichs would react in this kind of situation, or Isabelle, the guidance councillor's really pretty secretary.

He stared at Veronica, his dark eyes searching and at the same time, attempting to soothe. She was obviously very upset, and almost on the verge of being hysterical. Veronica had been wondering these empty black tunnels of Hell far longer than he had. Heck! She'd probably been here ever since the day she'd 'died'. Just what could have happened to the poor girl?

In the sunsets warmth, Eddie noticed how feeble and skinny she'd gotten. Her skin was both paper white and paper thin, and veins stood out in her temple. Her eyes looked shrunken in their sockets, but there was no way Veronica Grogan would ever cry - she had pride!

'C'mon. Let's get outta here, you need to go home and rest.' Eddie said, smoothing her hair behind her ears, forgetting how she hated to be touched, 'Your parents are probably worried sick.' That last sentence was a lie - the Grogan family had already had a funeral, and a small casket with a bouquet of English roses and a picture of Veronica was buried - there was no body, just a lot of blood and a pair of underwear identified by laundry mark as property of Veronica

Grogan.

When it seemed Veronica was frozen to the spot, Eddie made as if to grab her hand - 'What are you doing?' she asked, regaining her composure, eyes bright with confusion.

'I'm taking you home, silly. You live up near all those big lardy-dar houses don't you?'

Veronica's face fell again, and Eddie's heart felt crushed with sadness.

'Why would I want to go home? It's wonderful here!' She yelled, grinning from ear to ear. With a little skip and a curtsy, she bounced back into the mouth of the tunnel. Her petticoats ruffled in the wind, and her waist-length hair was carried with along with it. Veronica Grogan was beautiful, no doubt, but she was screwy.

Eddie Corcoran sighed; 'Fine, suit yourself, Ronnie. I'm going home. Please be safe here, and do think about going back home sometime - if I were your daddy, I'd be so, so worried about you.' He turned his back on her, and set off home. But don't worry, Eddie wouldn't really leave her to struggle all by herself - as soon as got home the first thing he would do would be to call the police and tell them he'd just found a missing person out in the barrens.

'It's 'Veronica' not 'Ronnie'!' came an angry voice from ten feet away. Eddie laughed humorlessly.

## 5

Veronica watched impassively as her ex-classmate turned his back on her. Her lower lip trembled as she stomped her foot again in a sudden temper. How dare he just barge in here and declare her crazy?! Veronica wasn't pleased - in fact, she would be in a sour mood for the rest of the day. Sadly, she didn't have anybody to take it out on. Georgie Denbrough and Avery Hockstetter were already gone. Turning heel and splashing back into the sewer tunnel, even more mud caking against her legs and staining her dress, Veronica decided to get back to her friends. The two little boys were the only real companions she'd made down there. Everybody else was a little cold and distant, almost although they ruled the place; Veronica supposed

a lot like herself, but that suited her just fine. If they wanted to be all funny about it then that was just peachy... But God, she missed Greta Bowie! The young girl half wondered if her friend missed her as they were always at odds, always arguing, but in the end she supposed they were actually great friends. She debated what Greta was doing right now (judging by the time she was either brushing her hair 100 times before she went to bed, or playing on her mother's rocking chair, reading by sunset on her back porch) and whether she missed her as much as Veronica missed her.

Shaking her head miserably of the memories and carrying on with her seemingly endless journey, Veronica traced the edge of the tunnel with her forefinger and gave a shaky smile. *It won't be so bad forever! Hey, maybe Greta will be here soon? It's pretty pathetic having a six and a two year old as friends. They're more like little, annoying brothers. After all, they can't talk about boys or party dresses!*

The further she got in the sewers, the more the scenery ebony to steel and eventually a rainbow variety of colours, the crumbling claustrophobic walls transformed. Almost like a picture book, almost like a horror movie, the sewers could be anything you wanted - it all depended on your frame of mind. To Veronica, it was although she lived in Cinderella's castle; for the narrow pitch black entrance morphed into something beautiful, something magical. Turrets, bunting and baroque-esque balconies sprouted from the ever widening walls and maze-like tunnels reminding Veronica of the time she went to Versailles with her parents. Purples, pinks, pastel blues and white erupted from the base of the walls, spreading and painting the place with colour from top to bottom. Veronica's jaw went slack. She had never seen anything like this happen before. Not in reality, anyway. Pondering if she'd somehow slipped outside the sewers and hit her head rather hard, Veronica stopped to catch her breath. It was simply gorgeous but the girl couldn't help but feel something was wrong... Her vision was blurry and everything felt although it was being viewed through a gauze veil. As her eyes fell in and out of focus, Veronica could distantly recognise that somebody was watching her closely.

At the sudden sound of music, Veronica flinched back to the real world, her tearful eyes wide with fear. She wished Eddie was still

here. Sure, he was stupid... Sure, he was poor - but he had made her feel safe, even just for a little while. The music sounded either very European or very circus-y to Veronica. She racked her brains back to those many boring music lessons at Derry Elementary and could recognise an accordion and a xylophone somewhere in there. Straining her eyes to see where the melody could be coming from, Veronica knew it was all in vain. She knew deep down she was going as mad as Henry Bowers used to be... Either that, or the place was haunted! The girl kicked herself for thinking that, suddenly becoming very afraid.

'Georgie?' she called half-heartedly, simply hearing multiples of herself chanting through the structure. 'Avery?'

Giggling rang maddeningly through the sewers, bouncing off the walls and vibrating through the place, causing Veronica to jump in surprise. She still wasn't properly used to this place. Letting out a little cry as a hand fell on her shoulder, Veronica's eyes darted to the left to see a gloved hand pressing against her. She whipped around, eyes wider than ever before and caught sight of a clown hovering less than two metres from her face, it's ghastly hand detached from it's body. Veronica clutched her paling face in pure white-hot terror, not quite sure if her mind was playing tricks on her.

*I don't want to be insane, her mind raced. I don't want to be insane. I don't want to be insane. I don't want to be insane! I don't want to be insane! I don't want to be insane!*

The clown gave a roar of high-pitched laughter with sickening, childish glee, it's eyes almost luminescent in the sudden darkness and it's face mere inches away from Veronica's. Like a candle being blown out, the clown faded away into a smoke screen.

*Hello there, Veronica!* Veronica could hear a voice although she wasn't entirely sure if it was just in her head or if she was actually listening to somebody speaking. *We all float down here, and now you do too!* The voice was more of a shriek-ish gargle than like any human voice Veronica had ever heard before. Just the sound of it made her skin burst out in goosebumps.

'Who are you?'

*I am Pennywise the Dancing Clown. I am eternal child.*

'Oh...'Veronica wasn't entirely certain of what to say next. Sure she was terrified. She couldn't even see who she was speaking too and half wondered if she really *had* gone insane.

'Well, why am I here?'

*You can't escape, child. Even if you find the exit you won't ever want to leave.*

Annoyed that the clown hadn't even answered her question, Veronica pressed on; 'How do you know I won't want to leave? You don't know what I'm thinking.'

A terrible choking laugh rang through Veronica's ears. *Oh, but I know everything you're thinking. I know everything! There is nothing I don't know about you!* This statement gave Veronica the chills. She decided to say nothing after that.

It was true that something down here had stopped Veronica from leaving... That was what disturbed her most of all. Not only that, but Veronica was finding her family to be nothing more than a distant memory. Eddie had said that they'd missed her something awful - Eddie had said they were worried about her; what a lie. How could he be so cruel? Had her family even bothered looking for her? Veronica doubted it as much as she doubted Beverly Marsh was a secret millionaire.

'You still haven't answered my question, Pennywise. Why am I down here?'

More freakish laughter. This time it made her feel belittled and stupid rather than intimidated. 'Tell me!'

*Oh what a poor little rich girl... So sad and lonely despite her luxuries. Poor little tyke had no true friends, she was only forced to be with Greta Bowie at her mother's Ladies Club... How sad for you!*

Veronica's cheeks flushed with anger. 'This place isn't as great as you think! It's real disgusting and such a cheap knockoff from the real Versailles!'

Suddenly the girl wished she hadn't said that. As fast as the scenery had changed earlier, the paint came seeping back into the walls, leaving the world in black and white once again. The turrets exploded; the bunting got torn down in a sudden gust, the balconies crumbled and faded, landing in the murky stream with a large splash. Surrounded by complete darkness, Veronica wondered where the ghastly clown had disappeared to. The rotten, dank smell of the sewers filled her nostrils and made her gag as sewer water gushed around her legs. Slowly the water rose to the middle of her calves, forcing her to raise her dress a little to keep it from getting even more wet and filthy. Losing her navigation, the young girl dizzily waded her way over to the ceramic tube walls. It was so hard to keep her balance as the water was running so fast. Small lumps of something pale and cold kept hitting her legs and getting tangled with the hem of her dress. Wondering what they were, Veronica scooped one up in her cupped hands and cleared the muck from the lump with her fingertips.

'Oh! Oh my goodness!' She dropped the lump in horror. It was a lump of flesh! Vomit ran through the girls fingers as she heaved, hands covering her paled face. Veronica just couldn't believe this place. Apparently there was no way out either... She'd found the exit earlier with Eddie but why hadn't she been able to leave? It was almost although somebody had taken over her mind as she stood in the tunnels mouth side-by-side with Eddie Corcoran. It didn't take a genius to realise who. Pennywise. Veronica wished she hadn't ever gone to the corner shop that day back in early May. That day had changed everything - one minute she was buying ice cream from some old man in the store - the next, she was lying face-first in filth, her dress completely ruined and hopelessly lost. *Best to just suck up to this Pennywise character and do whatever he says. He could be dangerous. He sounds as mad as Henry Bowers!*

With Veronica, pride always breaks through her mother's mentality to be impassive and sweet to everybody. Veronica was no doormat. When Patrick Hockstetter pulled her hair during Algebra, she had yelled at him to stop and caused a commotion with stupid Mrs Reichs. When Trashmouth loudly called her a 'rich-bitch' in front of Beverly Marsh, causing her to giggle like the little piglet she was, did you expect Veronica Grogan to simply smile and nod? That time

when Bowers had given Greta an Indian-burn, Veronica had very nearly kicked him where it hurts. All of those times Veronica had proved to both herself and her parents that she could be independent and stand up for herself when others weren't quite so kind and gentle. Today she felt as submissive and powerless as a rag doll. Pennywise had gotten deep into her psyche and Veronica found she would do anything he said, anything at all. Even if it's just to stay alive in this dark and frightening place.

*My, my... This certainly is no place for a princess like you, Ronnie.*

'Don't... don't call me 'Ronnie'. I hate that.'

*Ah, but don't you secretly love it when Eddie Corcoran calls you that?*

Veronica flushed at this lie, 'No way! Not at all!'

It was all silent for a minute and then... *Aren't you lonely down here all lonesome on your ownsome?* Veronica could almost hear the amusement in the clown's high-pitched wheeze.

'I don't think so. I have Georgie and Avery if I want them.'

Veronica couldn't even see her hand in front of her face anymore, it was that dark. Briefly she knew it was night outside, guessing the time from 10pm-1 or 2am. As her sense of sight was now disabled by her permanent state of darkness, Veronica found she could no longer move about the place without getting hurt. Was this what it was like to go mad? Veronica sometimes heard of some horrible cases in the newspapers where some poor girl or woman had been kidnapped by a mad-man - forced to live forever in constant darkness in a small box or coffin, taken out every once in a while to be tortured and tormented. Maybe this is an exaggeration, but that is how Veronica feels right now.

*Do you really? Where are they now, bucko?! Hmm?*

'Well... They're just over there of course.' Veronica had no idea where 'just over there' was - she had no idea where she was herself with the place being so suffocatingly dark. She didn't want to cry for fear that the clown would take advantage of that and make her situation a



whole lot worse. What made matters worse was that Veronica didn't want to go home anymore; she didn't want to be anywhere but the false wonderland that Pennywise had shown her earlier. She'd been bad by snapping at him, and this darkness was her punishment. How long would it last before she could be back there again? Veronica was sick of standing in one spot for hours, unable to look at anything but the colour black and forced to wade around in the murky sewage water. 'Um, Pennywise? Look, I'm sorry I made you mad. I do really like it down here.'

Lights flashed in Veronica's eyes, dazzling and fazing her both at the same time. The sewers erupted with a bright white light almost like a car's headlights. Feeling giddy and elated, Veronica began to giggle quietly to herself, feeling her grip on reality slide even further down hill. These were the dead-lights she often heard Georgie murmur about to his younger friend.

*This what you wanted, Ronnie?*

## 5. Chapter 5

Eddie could have screamed when he realised where he was, where he'd always been and where he may remain for as long as he keeps going. The shriek worked its way up in his throat but died and came out as a low, miserable groan. His head felt like he had been beaten half to death and his face was black and blue with green thrown in for good measure. Darkness swirled around him almost nauseatingly. It felt almost although the tunnel was shaking and rolling, but Eddie knew it was just his tired eyes playing tricks on him. That, he was used to down here. After all, how does an evil clown work its way into a sewer?

*Only in Derry!* Came a shrill, amused voice from Eddie's left, forcing him to turn and face his worst nightmare. *We all float! Here in Derry, we'll all float and you will too! Only in Derry will you see-*

Pennywise's voice was cut off by Eddie's blood-curdling scream. Just moments before he was back home with his mother watching TV. How did he get back here? Scratch that! *When* did he get back here?

A hooked claw grabbed onto Eddie's right leg and refused to let go despite how much he kicked, screamed and struggled. The sounds of laughing rang throughout the tunnels like a terrible chanting nursery rhyme, reminding the boy that he would never make it out alive. If he'd been to this awful place once before with no memory of ever getting there, then maybe he was stuck in limbo; and this was Hell, or the afterlife or whatever you'd like to call it. Eddie knew he was dead. When he rang the doorbell, nobody answered so he had to crawl his way in through the upstairs bathroom window by climbing up onto the roof (scraping his already bloodied knees and collecting more bruises along the way). He had ran into his sitting room where his mother was sat watching TV, crying. Eddie remembered yelling 'Mom!' as loud as his lungs could bear, but she hadn't even batted an eyelid in response, simply continuing to weep. He had felt like a ghost boy. Nobody could see or hear him, only just feeling his presence when he threw a book across the room in despair. To Eddie's mother, it was like somebody had strode past as she got a prickly, chilled feeling; the hairs standing up on the back of her neck

as the smell of the sewers came flooding in like disease.

*You'll die if you try, Eddie. You'll DIE IF YOU TRY!*

His mother had looked surprised for a second, but soon went back to focusing on *American Bandstand*. The sadness Eddie had felt in that moment was overwhelming. He hadn't known what he had expected to happen, but it certainly wasn't that. Eddie was crushed.

*We're coming for you, Eddie! We're going to punish you for running away, Eddie!* Came a familiar voice. Eddie wasn't quite sure who it was in his confused and panicky state of mind, but he knew later on it was actually Matthew Clements, a little boy a few years below him from Derry Elementary.

Eddie picked himself up from the wet floor and ran for his life (if he was even living). His eyes bugged out his face as he sprinted, greased hair flying and arms pumping as fast as they could. He wanted to know how he had gotten back in this monster-infested corridor of Hell - he certainly hadn't waltzed here of his own doing - that would be insanity in it's purest form, my dear. The children down here certainly were odd. They always stood in pairs of two, expressions exactly mirroring their partners. Lined up like dolls on a dusty shelf, the children of the sewers were not living, but you couldn't exactly call them dead either - they were far too animated and sprightly for that what with their constant chants of 'Kill him!' and 'Make him float with us, Pennywise!'. Their hearts had pumped it's last round of blood around their pallid, grimy bodies a long, long time ago; maybe even before Eddie was born? Maybe even before America was discovered?! That claw that had wrapped itself around Eddie's ankle whilst dragging him away from his home via the storm drain had left bloody wells and two bruises the shape of kidneys. Eddie felt like it was broken despite being so certain he was as dead as the doll-like children chasing after him.

Water splashed everywhere as eleven pairs of rotten feet flew through the sewers, each pair getting closer and closer to the terrified Eddie Corcoran.

'Help! Help!' Eddie cried, 'Veronica, please help me! Veronica!'

More childish laughter erupted around him, causing him to almost stop in his confusion. He wondered if the kids were laughing at him for calling for the help of a twelve year-old girl.

'I'm not going to *help you*, Eddie,' Came an embarrassed, haughty voice from directly behind Eddie, 'Grow a pair and help yourself. Besides, stop screaming my name like that, it's humiliating and makes you sound like a whiny baby!'

Eddie whipped directly around and came face to face with the smirking Veronica Grogan. She had held of a girl and a boy's hand, her pretty yet dirty face half illuminated in the dull lighting. Her long hair was crusted over with grime and mold from slipping over at some point. They had stopped chasing after him like a gang of foxes after a rabbit, and Eddie had that to be grateful for at least. Much to Eddie's disgust, she was still wearing the same yellow and white gingham dress she was wearing the last time he saw her (since the day she disappeared and died).

'Nice to see you too! I thought I told you to go home!'

'I thought you were going home,' she shot back, 'but obviously it seems that you're so obsessed with me that you just can't leave me alone!' A chorus of giggling echoed throughout the place, causing a pipe overhead to quiver slightly.

Eddie felt slightly disgraced, his cheeks flaming but his fear seemingly evaporating. His mother always taught him that if you couldn't say anything nice, don't say anything at all. He couldn't trust himself to say anything nice to the girl mocking him for showing compassion and common decency; that he cared for her, his *classmate* and nothing more.

'Well, you might as well remain here along with us,' she said flatly, her own cheeks blushing at how cheeky she was being, 'The real world isn't ideal for you anymore, Eddie. That's the reason I prefer it a whole lot more down here... Mommy and daddy wouldn't know I was still alive even if I screamed in their faces. Stay with us. It's beautiful down here.'

Eddie almost laughed, 'Beautiful?! Veronica, it's *disgusting*.'

'Don't you say that! Don't you *dare*, Eddie Corcoran! I can't *believe* you!'

'Look, I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, but look around you: it's filthy.'

Eddie should have known that as soon as he said that, the sewers would prove him wrong and make a mockery of him. More panned laughter rang in his ears and Eddie was persuaded by a voice in the back of his mind that the laughter was like the ones you'd hear in a bad comedy film, put in just to force a laugh out of the audience even when the scene they're watching is deadly serious. Eddie wasn't laughing. No, not even a smile touched his lips as the sewers transformed before his very eyes. This wasn't funny - it was sick. A sick, sick trick that somebody just loved to play on him. Somebody as sick and disturbing as the trick itself it seemed. Only a freak would get a kick out of scaring children like this.

The ceramic walls shook before discharging a whole rainbow variety of colour from its very core. Eddie's eyes started to bug again before he reminded himself he had company. He forced himself not to exclaim as flowers snaked and curled themselves around the tubes and wires, in every colour of flower you could imagine. It was like watching as the whole world as he knew it changed for the better. The white dead-lights forced their way to Eddie's brown eyes and he knew he wouldn't ever like to leave this place with the sweetest smile imaginable. Not now, not for anybody. Feeling so elated and happy, the nervous nagging in the back of his head was muted to a mere whisper. Never again would Eddie feel so anxious and worried - the sewers persuaded him of that much.

'Alright, I guess I'll stay, Veronica,' Eddie smiled, taking the dead girl by the hand.

'I'm glad,' she replied, returning his boyish smile and leading him off to play with all the other dead kids under Derry.

Anybody else would have thought the boy had taken something - Hallucinogens, perhaps - to wind up so horribly, pathetically confused about the world around him. Whenever an adult of Derry went down to work in the sewers, they couldn't see the dead children play and dance; they couldn't see the kid's wonderland around them,

nor predict the cold, clammy hands to clasp around their legs before being dragged down into the sewage water to be eaten alive. To this day their skeletons lay like trophies in the chambers of Pennywise's Funhouse along with the children that ate them.